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The Landmarks of Federal Hill: "The Development of Federal Hill"

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The Broadway-Armory Historic District is situated on a hill to the west of downtown Providence. It is a large "L"-shaped area, it takes as its modern opening the wide thoroughfare of Broadway, running east and west for thirteen blocks near its northern boundary, and the old Dexter Training Grounds, a large open space lying toward the southern border at right angles to Broadway and itself dominated by the Cranston Street Armory.

Westminster Street cuts the district between Broadway and the Training Ground, and although today it is the most dividing line in this area, historically it provided the first force for settlement of the District. Originally the agricultural lands of Providence were known simply as the West Side, the development patterns of the Broadway Historic District was established by 1835, and the present character of the District dates primarily from its later growth during the nineteenth century as an upper-and middle-class suburban neighborhood.

While this section was still all farmland, in the eighteenth century, a system of turnpikes was established radiating from the settled central community of Providence into the Colony's furthestmost lands. Two of these roads - Westminster Street and Cranston Streets - passed through the West Side and by providing access to its farms, brought the first development of the Historic District.

As the century ended these two roads, together with Messer Street - then flanked by valuable extensive farm properties.

On one of these farms, north of Cranston Street near Messer Street, was located the Asa Messer Mansion; one of the City's most extravagant Federal Houses, it was demolished in the 1890's. This property was the last of the land estates in the District to give way to development. Another of these farms, that of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, was given to the City at the beginning of the nineteenth century and named the Dexter Training Grounds; stretching north from Cranston Street nearly to Westminster Street, it is today the only open space in the Historic District.

A small hamlet dating from 1772 was once located in the neighborhood, just north of Westminster Street, near what later became Carpenter Street. This hamlet has since disappeared, and only a few houses of the Federal period remain in the entire district. The two best preserved were the G.A. Cole House at 1208 Westminster Street and the other was the S.A. Winsor House at 150-152 Courtland Street, also from the same period of 1820's which represented another type then common in the city; a Federal double house.

By 1835, extensive urbanization of the area was developing, with concentration between Broadway and Cranston Street. The basic street or pattern, by then was largely established, though with the exception of Carpenter Street the houses were not closely spaced. This street, was settled mostly by the city's fast growing middle class, it had become by mid-

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By Comm. Joseph R. Muratore © 1980

"The Development Of Federal Hill"

century, one of Providence's most densely populated streets. Today, Carpenter Street still holds an almost solid row of Greek Revival and Early Victorian two-and-a-half story "gable enders", a style largely the result of the increasing demand for street frontage.

At 72 and 78 Marshall street, adjacent to one another, were built two of the most handsome houses of the era. The first one dating from about 1830, retained the earlier Federal design of the five-bay window. At 78 Marshall Street, is located a house built about ten years later in the style of a Doric temple; one-and-a-half stories high with a full portico set across the front gable on four columns.

At 366 Broadway stands the H. Knight house of about 1835; it is the most imposing Greek Revival home in the area: it is also the first of the large estates to be located on Broadway. The bulk of the architectural makeup of the Broadway Armory Historic District is Victorian.

When Broadway was extended in 1850 westerly to Olneyville and was broadened to eighty feet - it became the widest street in the city and it

was connected by horsecar to old downtown and East Side sections of Providence; during the subsequent decades until the turn of the century, it became a highly desirable and fashionable residential boulevard, and the location of elaborate estates of Providence's mercantile and professional "nouveau-riche".

(To be Continued)

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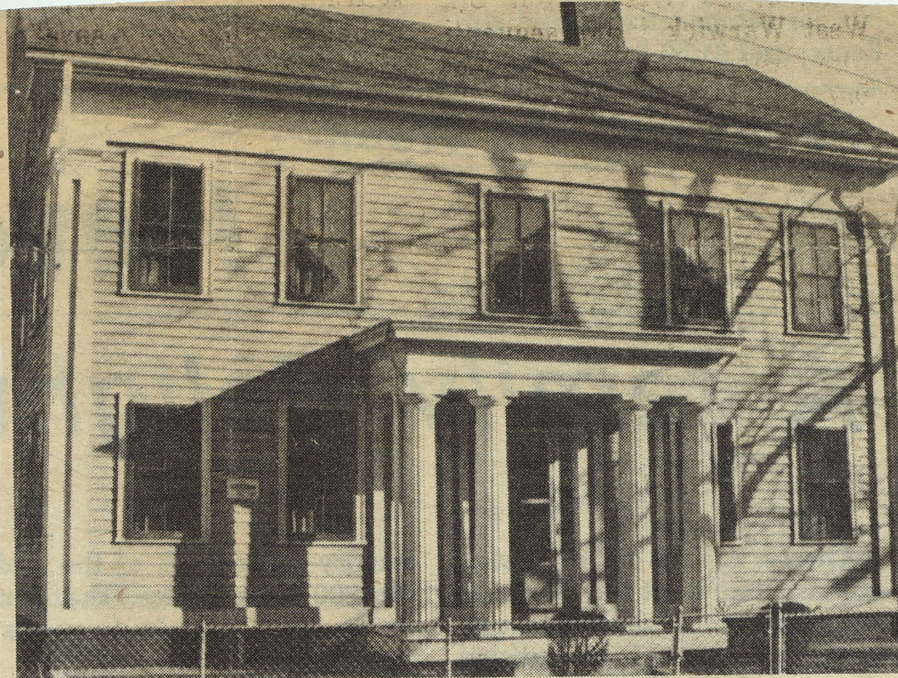
Charles Wyman Hopkins - The house Lots of the Early Settlers of the Providence Plantations with Notes and Plats, Providence, 1886.



463 Broadway - The "John E. Thorp House" built around 1875, a 2½ story late Victorian Queen Ann dwelling, with complex hip roof with projecting cross. Note the beautiful scroll work in the center gable.



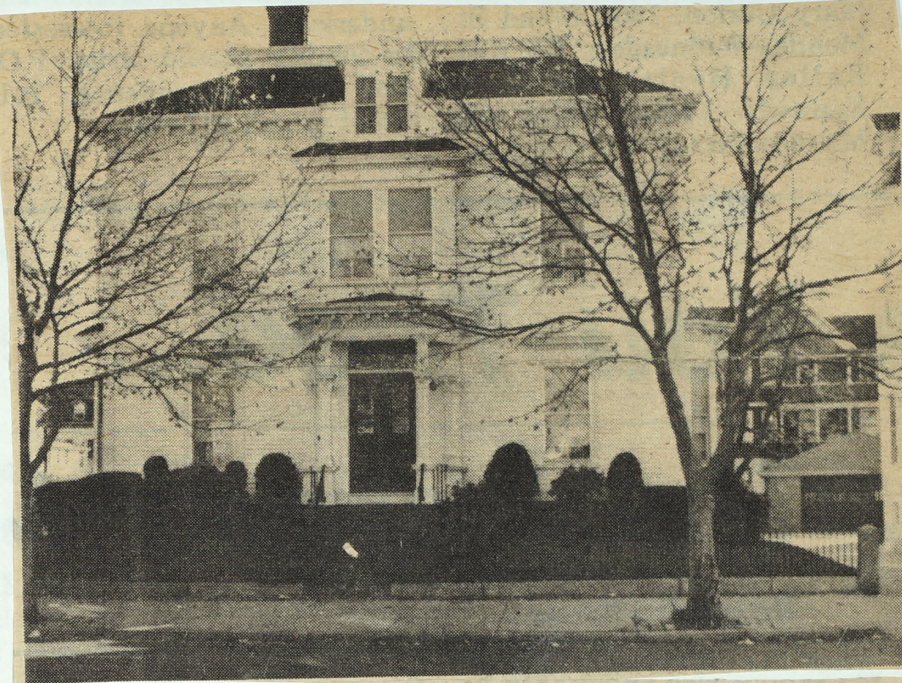
477 Broadway - This home built around 1895 is a beautiful 2½ story late Victorian Queen Ann with complex hip roof and cross gables and side turret. Please note the two tall Elizabethan brick chimneys.



72 Marshall Street - This home was built about 1830 and is a beautiful 2½ story Greek Revival home with gable roof and heavy return eave moldings set longside to the street. Please note the one-story portico with four head doric columns centered on the main entrance.



529 Broadway - A gorgeous residence built around 1895. A 2 story late Victorian Queen Ann house with a hip roof and projecting interesting corner bay. The facade contains a gabled central element with a one story Italianate portico, beautiful double entry doors and transom lights with a modified Palladian window above. This was the homestead of Dr. Verdi for many years.



466 Broadway - The "Harriet E. Fuller House" built around 1870. This is a 2½ story symmetrical late Victorian house with a hip roof with brackets and dentils. Details include central Italianate portico double doors and dentiled cornices over windos, with an excellent iron and granite fence which still exists today. Mrs. Fuller owned a boarding house at 249 Westminster Street in 1875.



514 Broadway - The "George W. Prentice House" built around 1880. A magnificent 2½ story late Victorian Chateau with low flaring hip roof with gables and a six stage corner tower with a pagoda roof. The very elaborate detailing combines Italianate and second Empire style which includes brackets and bold ornaments. It was built for the President of Heaton Button Fastener Co., at 223 Eddy Street. Later it became the homestead of the Melaragno family.